



TIDBITS

Tips and Helpful Links



Placement Considerations

Getting the Right Fit

It's been ten years since explicit language regarding placement considerations, known as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), was added to federal statutes. Guidelines for selecting the Least Restrictive Environment require that IEP teams first consider the general education classroom, with appropriate supports and services, as a viable placement option for students with special needs. If, based on evidence provided in the PLAAFP, the team considers an alternate placement along the continuum of service options, justification must be provided for choosing that more restrictive option as best for meeting a student's specific needs.

Recent changes in expectations for student academic outcomes must now become part of the IEP team decision making process for educational placements. The Arizona College and Career Ready Standards require that all students leave high school prepared to succeed in the workplace or higher education. To accomplish this, each grade level is responsible for student mastery of a

set of ELA and math standards that, over time, form a "staircase", ultimately leading to college and career readiness. The second change, correlating well with the goal of CCR, is the addition of Results Driven Accountability to compliance monitoring of special education programs, requiring evidence of academic progress in grade level content over time. As IEP teams deliberate placement options, these new variables must be considered alongside the student's current strengths and needs.

Many students with special needs can benefit from the depth of instruction in general education classes taught by content area experts, provided that those teachers work from accessible lesson plans. Results Driven Accountability requires that educators provide this access, regardless of where services are delivered, and will closely monitor the progress of students with special needs using measures tied to the new standards.



There are a multitude of advantages, both academic and social, associated with educating students with special needs in a general education classroom. General education teachers have been trained extensively and have a firm command of the standards for their grade levels. Interactions with general education students can help special needs students better understand academic content, and the general education students can serve as models for age-appropriate social interactions. Students with special needs help develop empathy and tolerance for individual differences among general education students, dispelling the myths that result from ignorance.

In contrast, a general education classroom placement can present challenges for some students with special needs.



The pace of instruction may be too fast, and that along with the higher depth of knowledge demands can overwhelm them, resulting in loss of motivation and increasing emotional or behavioral issues. General education teachers may not be prepared to meet the range of needs within their classroom due to time demands. Lessons developed from a one-size-fits-all approach fall short of meeting the needs of students on both ends of the spectrum.

Professional development in key areas such as lesson design and scaffolding instruction is critical as is built-in time for collaboration between the general education teacher and special education support staff. To ensure access, general education lesson plans might incorporate elements of universal design. Although this process is time-consuming on the planning side, it saves teachers from having to re-teach or retro-fit lessons to meet specific needs.



Collaboration is a great way to incorporate all the components of a universally designed lesson, minimizing the work for an individual teacher. Universal design has been shown to be beneficial for every student, not just those with special needs.

While universal design is a first step in developing accessible lessons, some students may still have specific needs beyond UD. Classroom teachers may need to provide scaffolding for both presentation and response options. Again, working with the special education teacher and referencing the IEP for strengths and needs, necessary scaffolding can be developed and monitored. For students who spend the majority of their day in the general education classroom, the ideal conditions for learning might include a co-teaching arrangement that provides for specific needs, but at a minimum, collaboration between the special education and the general education teacher in planning for instruction helps ensure that both presentation and response options provide access for the entire class.

Students who are placed in more restrictive settings such as extended resource or self-contained classes also need access to grade level content. Special educators providing instruction in these settings have the expertise to examine the building blocks of learning progressions, identifying skill gaps that need focused instruction. Cross-checking with general education lesson plans helps ensure that the planned depth of instruction satisfies the intent of the standard. Pacing and the degree of scaffolding can be adjusted here to better meet individual needs.

As IEP teams make placement determinations, access to standards-based instruction and the opportunity to demonstrate growth along learning progressions tied to those standards must be among primary considerations. Regardless of the placement selected, goals and lesson design should reflect a commitment to ensuring that college and career ready becomes a reality for all students.



For more information about placement of students with special needs, click on the following links:

http://wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/2357/2414567/Volume_medialib/Profiles/pp2b.pdf

http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr320.shtml

<http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues43.html>

<http://weac.org/articles/specialedinc/>

<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-43-spring-2013/seamless-teaching>

Alternate Assessment News



Important Dates:

AIMS A Science – grades 4, 8, and 10
Testing window: February 15 through March 31, 2015
Student entry through January 31, 2015

NCSC ELA and Math Assessments
Grades 3-8 and 11

Training window (TC and TAs):
March 9 through March 30, 2015

Testing window: March 30 through May 15, 2015

Testing Accommodations:

Finalized universal tools and features and testing accommodations have been posted for students taking AzMERIT. Students should be familiar with universal tools and features prior to using them in assessment. Accommodations must be listed in the student's IEP and used on a regular basis during instruction before they can be used in assessment.

For AzMERIT Accommodations, use the following link:

http://www.azed.gov/assessment/files/2014/11/azmerit-testing-accommodations-2015_final.pdf

Please contact ADE Assessment with any questions regarding accommodations for testing.

AZ Community of Practice

Join us on one of our February calls:

February 9th at 4:00 p.m.

or

February 12th at 3:30 p.m.

call topics include:

AIMS A Science wrap-up
pre-testing logistics

NCSC reminders and updates

Questions/concerns

Contact Cynthia Roller, Alternate Assessment Coordinator
cynthia.roller@azed.gov
for the link to the call

Contact Us:

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